3 Editors Say CIA Should Stop Using Foreign Journalists

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By John Jacobs
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Three prominent newspaper editors told a House intelligence subcommittee yesterday that the Central Intelligence Agency should stop using foreign journalists for CIA operations, because doing so means the United States is preaching the virtues of a free press at home while poisoning it abroad.

Eugene Patterson, president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors and editor of The St. Petersburg Times in Florida, said the CIA should ban the use of foreign reporters even if it makes the agency's job more difficult. He was particularly critical of a letter he received last month from CIA Director Stanfield Turner, which said that extending such restrictions "beyond U.S. media organizations is neither legally required nor otherwise appropriate . . ."

Until the CIA stops "paying off foreign journalists and fouling foreign news media, nobody in this world can credit the truthfulness of the American claim to stand for a free, untainted alternative to manipulated news," Patterson said.

Joining Patterson in opposition to CIA use of foreign journalists were Gilbert Cranberg, editorial page editor of The Des Moines Register-Tribune, and Clayton Kirkpatrick, editor of The Chicago Tribune.

Kirkpatrick, in his testimony before the Oversight Subcommittee of the House Intelligence Committee said failure to end the use of foreign reporters by the CIA interferes with American efforts to convice Third World governments to permit a free press rather than a government-controlled press.

Kirkpatrick said U.S. representatives to a United Nations conference in Kenya last year helped defeat a Soviet resolution to give international sanction to government use of the media.

"But as long as we are in this hypocritical two-faced position," Kirkpatrick said, "we are going to be morally weak."

Cranberg added that the CIA "should be required to quit planting false and misleading stories abroad, not just to protect Americans from propaganda fallout, but to protect all readers from misinformation."

Subcommittee Chairman Les Aspin (D-Wis.) asked Patterson why the CIA should be more diligent about not corrupting journalists than, for example, foreign labor leaders or cabinet ministers.

"The essence of democracy is letting people know what is going on," Patterson replied. "If a cabinet minister is being recruited by the CIA, then the press there can report that. But we should not use the media as a tool of government. The U.S.S.R. is saying exactly the opposite. As long as [CIA Director] Turner's letter holds up, we are playing right into their hands."